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A note on ILO's work in the field of Social Development

ILO has been long in the vanguard of the struggle to promote a better life for the mass of the population. This is nowhere more evident than in the field of training which constitutes by far the major part of the Organisation's technical cooperation activity. This activity is based on the recognised fact that economic development cannot be regarded as an end in itself but is a means to achieve the social objectives of our Societies. As the Director- General of the ILO has said in his Report to the International Labour Conference this year, "What we have to seek is the freedom and dignity of man and his right to live and work in better conditions than hitherto". The role of training in achieving these social objectives can scarcely be over-emphasized Training is the only way to help millio of workers without jobs or in low productivity jobs to break out of the poverty trap in which lack of appropriate skills holds them. It is only through training that people can be helped to adapt themselves to changing skill requirements of a dynamic and developing society. The importance of human resources development has recently been emphasized in the deliberations on the shape of Africa in the year 2000 following the Monrovia Colloquium in which the ILO played, we hope, a not insignificant part, and constitutes an important element of the Lagos Plan of Action approved by OAU Heads of State & Government at the first ever economic summit held in April. It is ILO's hope that in this endeavour of the development of Africa's vast potential human resources, it would be our privilege to assist substantially.

ILO has tried to assist member countries through its technical cooperation activities to promote programmes of diversified training in all sectors of the

economy. The focus of attention, in the rural sector, is placed on the most needy groups of the population and in the formulation of rural training programmes aimed at fostering self-reliance. An idea of the comprehensiveness of ILO's efforts in this field may be gained by the fact that technical assistance provided by the Organisation has covered the following fields:

(a) programmes for training rural instructors, animators and village leaders;

(b) programmes for training rural artisans, agricultural mechanics and other rural workers;

(c) programmes for training young unemployed rural people, including an element of basic education;

(d) programmes to prepare young people for land settlement schemes;

(e) special programmes for rural women;

(f) programmes to introduce an element of technology into basic education; and

(g) programmes to train forest workers.

As regard industrial vocational training the emphasis in the ILO's technical cooperation activities is placed on the establishment and upgrading of training institutions, apprenticeship training schemes and in-plant training. Specialised training has been provided to a number of countries in such fields as road and rail transport, building construction etc. To do its part in the fulfilment of the desire of African states to achieve the Lima targets, attention has been particularly focussed on the training of three categories of manpower which play a critical role in the industrialisation process: managers, supervisors and technicians. Conscious of the potential for employment creation and therefore greater

opportunities of income-generation and the problems of the smaller enterprises the ILO has devoted great deal of attention to assistance to this category of workers in these enterprises. Mention may be made in this context of research undertaken on skill acquisition and self-employment in French-speaking Africa of which the study phase has been completed and it is hoped that an operational project will make it possible to put the results of the findings to practical use.

It is the ILO's stand that training is a basic right and a basic need to which every person, man or woman, boy or girl, should have access if he or she so desires. It is natural, therefore, that ILO has not neglected the more disadvantaged sections of society in its work in this area. Thus attention has been given to problems of training of women and youth and the vocational rehabilitation of the disabled. In this context mention may be made of two steps taken by the ILO to promote training on a broader basis than has been the case hereto. One is a Resolution adopted by the International Labour Conference concerning the follow-up to the World Employment Conference, last year, which called upon member-states, inter alia, "to pay particular attention, in formulating development strategies, to ensuring a better use of available human resources" and to "pursue and intensify efforts towards developing coherent training policies and systems which meet not only the needs of industrial development but also those of the large number of people in rural and urban areas who have dropped out from the school system or who have had no access to training with a view to improving both their employment or self-employment opportunities and their quality of life". ILO has also approved a Convention (No. 142) concerning Vocational Guidance and Vocational Training in the Development of Human Resources of which Article 1 calls upon member-states to "adopt and develop comprehensive and coordinated policies and programmes of

vocational guidance and vocational training, closely linked with employment, in particular through public employment services". It is our hope that African member-states will ratify this Convention at the very earliest.

In the last few years ILO activity has tended to concentrate on the follow-up and implementation of the Plan of Action prepared by the World Conference on Employment and Income Distribution, Social Progress and the International Division of Labour which was held in 1976. Pride of place in this activity goes to the attempts to orient development strategies towards the satisfaction of basic needs. This is a natural sequel to the general disenchantment with earlier strategies which have failed to ensure that the fruits of development should be distributed so as to benefit the mass of the people. A great deal of research has been undertaken by the ILO, at Headquarters, on conceptual questions, the implications of a basic-needs oriented growth strategy and the present state of basic-needs satisfaction around the globe In the Africa Region, the Jobs and Skills Programme for Africa, which is the African arm of the World Employment Programme has sought to promote the basic-needs strategy through its Employment Advisory Missions, of which, by the end of last year, 7 had been fielded in Zambia, Swaziland, Somalia, Tanzania, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Lesotho. 13 Sectoral employment missions have sought to deal with employment generation problem in various sectors of the economy as employment furnishes the only means of creating the incomes with which basic-needs can be met. A number of national basic-needs seminars and one with the support of ECOWAS are in the offing to help create national awareness about the problems of implementation of a basic-needs oriented strategy of growth in particular and the importance of social development in general. In this context mention may also be made of the setting of the Employment and Basic Needs Planning Team for Southern

Africa. The Team will assist countries in the South African Region in the fields of employment generation and basic-needs satisfaction policies and programmes.

Perhaps it will be of interest to mention here some of the other major areas of ILO's work in the field of social development. ILO has interested itself with a major study programme of problems of income distribution and poverty eradication. As a result of these studies and the dissemination of these findings a greater understanding of two principal phenomena has been achieved. The first of these is the interaction of income distribution with growth and development and, consequently, of the forces leading to the creation and perpetuation of poverty. The second is an improved understanding of the relevance and efficiency of various instruments in dealing with the twin problems of poverty eradication and better income distribution. Some of these issues, in particular, the state of income distribution and the rural - urban income gap have also been studied, in the African context, by JASPA.

The Africa Labour and Population Project has concerned itself with education and family welfare aimed at extending family planning motivation and services through existing programmes for workers in both anglo-and franco-phone Africa. The programme has also attempted to create more awareness of the inter-relationship between demographic factors and economic/social development planning. To achieve these objectives the programme has developed, with and through appropriate government/national institutions, country projects to help build the necessary infrastructure that can carry out welfare education activities at micro level on one hand, and employment policy and research activities on the other.

The focus of ILO action in the field of rural development has also been on poverty eradication. Attention has been given to the development of appropriate

technology in the field of roads construction and rural handicrafts and small-scale industry, the purpose being to help increase employment while ensuring productivity increases. An important means of alleviating the problem of un and under-employment in rural and even urban areas can be a programme of labour-intensive public works which can help in the development of infrastructure as land, water resources afforestation, and feeder roads which can contribute so much to the productive capacity which creates employment. Thus a great deal of attention has been given to training in planning and implementation of labour-intensive public works in which a number of African countries have participated.

An area of activity which needs to be mentioned in the context of ILO's efforts to promote the well-fare of the disadvantaged is that of cooperatives. The main target groups of the ILO's work in this field are the rural and urban poor, women and young people. Efforts have been made to promote cooperatives in various fields such as credit, services, consumers cooperatives, and/sales etc. and the result has been that the number, activity and turnover of cooperatives has increased with distinct improvement in the returns to the small producers. Emphasis has been placed on improvement in management and efforts to improve management training for cooperatives have been strongly supported in a number of African countries.

Last but not least mention must be made of ILO's continuing work in the field of improvement of working conditions and environment. The programme which is known by its French acronym PIACT,

- encourages Member-states to set for themselves definite objectives for the improvement of working conditions and environment;

- treats the problems of working conditions and environment globally, articulating more closely than before the fields of conditions of work and life and occupational safety and health;

  and

- views these problems in the wider context of general economic and social policies.

The ILO attaches great importance to this programme and has therefore provided the services of a Regional Adviser in working conditions to African member-states from its Regular Budget resources since 1977. Much has already been done by way of exploratory missions and it is hoped that member-states will soon come up with operational projects in the field.